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ABSTRACT

Political cartoons do not appear in the government-controlled press in the People's Republic of China. The cartoons that do appear in newspapers are good-natured and lacking in any type of political message. Chinese civilization has a 5,000-year history that is grounded in feudalism and must be considered in any analysis of Chinese society. Since the massacre in Tiananmen Square, the government has begun a crackdown on dissent and a re-education campaign is underway. The press has begun promoting a government-subsidized hero, Lei Feng (as a mild form of political cartoon). The media in China often carry warnings to writers and artists to recall their "social responsibility" and refrain from expressing "corrupt" ideas. A typical cartoon that was promoted by the Chinese government was an educational cartoon series, directed at children and adults, that dealt with correct solutions to social problems. A review of contemporary press sources makes it clear that the student protest movement of 1989 brought on a period of unusual press freedom in China until the movement was crushed by government forces. After the government crackdown on dissent, freedom of the press left China as quickly as it came. The experience of 1989 suggests that if the Chinese government loosens its grip on the media, the result will be more politically oriented cartoons with themes unpreferred by the government. (Seventeen references are attached.) (SG)

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THE LACK OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

This article deals with the lack of political cartoons in the People's Republic of China and how this void is met through other means. Analysis will include description of the relevance of cartoons, the political situation in China, the lack of political cartoons in China, excerpts from Chinese media and the promotion of a government subsidized hero (as a form of political cartoon). The author has visited China three times, twice as a visiting professor. He is also assigned to the Pacific Command of the U.S. Air Force Intelligence Agency (as a Major in the Reserves).

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THE LACK OF POLITICAL CARTOONS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

The influence of cartoons in society has been analyzed from various theoretical perspectives. Focus on the role of political cartoons is a specific area of study. This article deals with the lack of political cartoons in The People's Republic of China and how this void is filled through other means. Analysis will include description of the relevance of cartoons, the political situation in China, the lack of political cartoons, excerpts from Chinese media, and the promotion of a government subsidized hero (as a form of political cartoon).

The author has visited China on three occasions. In 1987 he was a visiting professor at Northern Jiaotong University (Beijing), in 1988 he visited south China, and in 1991 he returned to Northern Jiaotong University as a visiting professor. Cross-cultural communication is his primary research area. He is a Major in the Air Force Intelligence Agency (as a reservist) and is assigned to the Pacific Command.

Cartoons have long been recognized as a form of mass communication. "Since the comics affect the culture in a variety of popular expressions . . . they merit study as active forces in the development of national ethos" (White and Abel, 1963, p. 3). The influence of cartoons, or art-parables, has been emphasized by a variety of scholars.

"Art-parable can catch a strong man's conscience" (Short, 1968, p. 12). Denis de Rougemont stated "Art-parable is a baited hook; a tender trap; a calculated trap for meditation" (Scott, 1964, p. 63). Picasso viewed art-parable as "a lie that makes us realize truth" (Hazelton, 1967, p. 16). "Art-parable then always has something to say; and for this reason it will always be more significant for mankind than mere entertainment ever could be" (Short, 1968, p. 15).

In a Journal of Educational Psychology article entitled "Comics as a Social Force," S.M. Greenberg wrote "Comics as a social force came upon us silently and grew to considerable proportions before the `guardians of culture' were aroused by them (Greenberg, 1944, p. 205). "The comics, in the first place, are potent communicators . . . . When Superman in 1940 zipped overseas and destroyed the Westwall, the Third Reich, in an abusive article in Das Schwarz Korps, branded the super-mundane comic hero a Jew" (White and Abel, 1963, p. 4).

The aforementioned example evidences how writers can use cartoons to convey desired meanings. Charles Schulz, author of "Peanuts," writes "I preach in these cartoons, and I reserve the same rights to say what I want to say as the minister in the pulpit" (Schulz, 1965, p. 46). Thus, it is clear cartoons can be used as political propaganda.

In a politically oppressive society such as The People's Republic of China, the author expected to find government use of political cartoons to persuade the masses and, to a lesser

degree, less overt forms of political cartoons used by dissidents to oppose the government. However political cartoons, as we know them in the west, are not common in China. An overview of Chinese society will provide needed context for understanding political communication in China.

Chinese civilization has a 5,000 year history that is grounded in feudalism. Feudalism emphasizes that personal expression, interests, and objectives are secondary to your position in society. Confucianism exemplifies feudalist thought. Confucianists argue "the first step toward good government and the realization of a harmonious society was for each person to know his role and perform it well according to the strictest interpretation of that role" (Pye, 1984, p.40). Feudalism was emphasized, especially since China's beginnings (roughly 3,000 B.C.), until 1911 A.D.

In 1911 the Nationalist Party overthrew the Ching Dynasty, the last dynasty in China. This began 38 years of turmoil during which China was forcibly opened politically and economically to the outside world. During this period the Communist Party was founded, the Japanese occupied China, and a civil war occurred between the Nationalists and Communists. The communists, led by Mao Tse Tung, won the civil war in 1949 and they established the present political structure (The People's Republic of China).

China closed to the outside world from 1949-1979. They did this primarily to reject foreign domination. Chairman Mao initiated a decade long cultural revolution in 1966 that

led to massive persecution of Mao's real (and imagined) political enemies. Since 1979, China has engaged in a variety of reforms to help it compete economically with the west. These reforms have included very minor political reforms regarding rights of the individual.

The concept of feudalism has been constant throughout the history of China. One Chinese student told the author "it is who we are." Feudalism must be considered during analysis of Chinese society.

On June 3, 1989 the Chinese government ordered troops to stop a six week long mass protest on Tienaman Square (the 100 acre public plaza in Beijing). It is estimated over 3,000 people were killed. The student-led protest was for an end of corruption in the communist party and greater rights for the individual. Since the massacre, the Chinese government began a massive crackdown against dissent and a re-education campaign is underway. There is considerable opposition to the government, especially in the cities.

The author has reviewed Chinese print media (Chinese and English language) for examples of political cartoons but has found nothing that strongly resembles political cartoons found in the west. The press is owned and controlled by the government thus one can deduct political cartoons are more a function of a free press (why would a government criticize itself?). One can find good-natured cartoons about Chinese life but these do not carry any type of political message. The government, as owner and operator of Chinese media, is

far more interested in providing politically correct instruction for Chinese citizens than providing criticisms of the government. One example of politically correct instruction, conveyed through the visual communication mode, deals with the life of Lei Feng. (a government subsidized hero). He will be discussed later in this article.

The author has reviewed major Chinese print media (newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets), from three recent periods, in search of materials directly related to political commentary via visual communication. These three periods (1987, 1989, and 1991) represent different political climates in China. 1987 is seen as a good reform year, that is, political expression was freer in comparison to other years. Spring, 1989 newspapers offer unique examples of political expression because this was during the massive pro-democracy movement that was supported by many segments of Chinese society (including journalists). 1991 media exemplifies a return to strict government control as the severe political crackdown is in full swing.

During March-June, 1987 the author was a visiting professor at Northern Jiaotong University (Beijing). He subscribed to the English language newspaper China Daily throughout this period and analyzed it for various types of cartoons. As previously indicated, 1987 is recognized as a good year regarding improvements with freedom of expression. Of course, this period ended abruptly in June, 1989 with the

Tienaman Square crackdown.

In 1987 artists and writers were encouraged to be socially responsible and politically correct with their art and literature. Wang Shen, Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Advisory Commission, stated "if writers want to achieve anything, they must, first of all, have a correct stand and be dedicated to the people's cause" ("Mao's talks...", 1987). Similarly, Zhang Xianliang, from the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, expressed "literature and arts should serve the people and socialism" ("Struggle makes writers...", 1987).

A typical cartoon that was promoted by the Chinese government was an educational cartoon series, directed at children and adults, that included the following characters: Wise Grandfather, Little Tiger, Dear Sister, Well-Informed Boy, and Little Hedgehog. This series often dealt with social problems and the correct solutions to these problems ("Children's paper wins trust...", 1987). This researcher never saw a cartoon in this series that dealt with a significant political issue.

Political warnings were found in Chinese media that gave writers and artists general guidelines to consider when dealing with political issues. The English language magazine Beijing Review carried such messages. "Some writers, however, have forgotten their social responsibility, producing bad and even vulgar works, spreading corrupt ideas,

blindly worshipping foreign culture and copying foreign things mechanically. This has been resented and criticized by the masses" ("Guidelines for literature"..., 1987). The final sentence from the aforementioned quote is a high context threat regarding the government's resolute position to oppose such expression.

A 1987 editorial in the South China Post (a major newspaper in Hong Kong) provided a glimpse of what was to come two years later. "Students, who feel suffocated by an educational system that determines where and what they study and assigns jobs after graduation, are acquiring a taste for greater freedom. Officials are devoting much energy and editorial space to attacks on the very notion of individualism, calling it pernicious western import. They are demanding altruistic allegiance to a system that has lost almost all of its moral credibility" (Hood, 1987).

In mid-April 1989 students in Beijing began a protest movement that soon gained support from many segments of the Chinese population throughout the country. The movement was crushed six weeks later on June 3. Students staged a hunger strike on Tienaman Square in May that fueled much of the support from non-student organizations (workers, farmers, professionals, retirees, etc.). Freedom of the press was strongest during this period. If liberal political cartoons were to exist this would be the time to find them.

The May 19, 1989 China Daily can be analyzed as an issue that represents journalistic reporting at the height of the

movement. This issue is full of stories dealing with, and sympathetic towards, the protest. Five of seven cover page stories deal with the protest. The editorial page includes an editorial quoting Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's support for political reform in China. The closest example of a political cartoon this researcher has ever seen in a Chinese publication was below the editorial. It is a 6 x 10 inch photograph of a line of students holding hands and a small boy stretching between their legs to see what the excitement is all about. The photo's caption merely reads "Revelations" (China Daily, May 19, 1989, p. 4). The issue also includes a full page collage of eight photographs, with mildly sympathetic captions, from protest activities at Tienaman Square.

Freedom of the press, or at least the Chinese version of it, left as quickly as it came after the June 3 crackdown. Indiscriminate shooting occurred throughout Beijing, intense persecution of dissidents began, and the media became a tool of the government to manipulate Chinese citizens. The crackdown continues. The crackdown gained considerable momentum a year and a half after the June 3 massacre when the world's spotlight was on the Gulf War. Thus, international scrutiny was less pronounced, allowing for greater political oppression by the government.

The author was in Beijing, as a visiting professor at Northern Jiaotong University, during the ground war offensive into Iraq. Review of Chinese print media during this period

evidenced the government clearly controlled the dissemination of information (government propaganda). The March 5, 1991 People's Daily exemplifies government emphasis on the aforementioned government subsidized hero Lei Feng. The People's Daily newspaper is published throughout China and has the largest circulation of any newspaper in that country. Four Lei Feng stories were featured on the cover page that particular day (People's Daily, March 5, 1991, p. 1).

Lei Feng, who is now dead, is a "quasi-mythical model of the perfect communist man . . . . who spent his days overachieving and his nights reading Mao thought" (Willey, et al, p. 40). He is frequently held up by the government as an example for Chinese citizens to follow. As previously mentioned, a random issue of People's Daily (March 5, 1991) carried four cover page stories about Lei Feng: 1) an editorial about Lei Feng as a model citizen/soldier, 2) names of selected Chinese citizens whose lives best exemplify the virtues of Lei Feng, 3) a conference held to study the virtues of Lei Feng, and 4) a travel agent who exemplifies Lei Feng virtues in her dedicated work with tourists. The visual omnipresence of Lei Feng is perpetuated through bill boards, films, newspapers, books and pamphlets.

In closing, the lack of political cartoons in China is directly related to the lack of a free press in China. The closest thing to political cartoons are the "politically correct" cartoons dealing with Lei Feng. The author expects if the government loosens it's grip on the media, resulting

in a less restrained media, this will result in more politically oriented cartoons with themes unpreferred by the government (as happened in 1989).

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